

The Effects of L2 Pragmatic Autonomous and Controlled Motivations on Engagement with Pragmatic Aspect

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Abstract: No study has investigated the relationship between student engagement per se and student motivation within second language (L2) pragmatics, notwithstanding the significance of engagement for L2 learning. Drawing on self-determination theory, the present study aimed to explore the effects of two global motivational orientations (autonomous and controlled motivations) on behavioral engagement within the perspective of L2 pragmatics. A total of 76 college students agreed to participate and were requested to fill out a tailor-made, 34-item, 6-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The results of data analysis using standard multiple linear regression revealed that both Autonomous and Controlled Motivations significantly predicted, and explained a large amount of variance in, Engagement, $F(2, 71) = 161.28, p < .01, R^2 = .82, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .81$, and that the effect of Controlled Motivation, $B = .33, t(71) = 8.05, p < .01$, was twice as large as that of Autonomous Motivation, $B = .16, t(71) = 4.91, p < .01$. These findings indicate that students' controlled motivation is more powerful in enhancing their engagement in learning L2 pragmatics. Pedagogically, it implies that teachers should bolster students' motivation in learning L2 pragmatics, which eventually can lead to their increased engagement.

Keywords: pragmatic motivation, autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, pragmatic engagement, self-determination theory

1. Introduction

From the vantage point of second language (L2) learning, engagement can be defined as cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional involvement in a L2 learning activity in or outside of class directed toward mastery of the L2 (Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Mercer, 2019; Hiver et al., 2021). It is a widely agreed-upon notion that success in L2 learning necessitates active involvement on the part of the learners in meaningful L2 interaction over an extended period of time (Brutt-Griffler & Jang, 2019; Dincer et al., 2019; Dörnyei, 2019; Reeve & Shin, 2020). The growing popularity of the concept of engagement in the field of SLA also pertains to its perceived malleability and amenability via pedagogical interventions (Skinner, 2016; Fredricks et al., 2019). In addition, theoretically, it is argued that "engagement has significant potential to inform understandings of language learning" (Henry & Thorsen, 2020, p. 460).

Motivation is one of the affective factors which can influence engagement (e.g. Svalberg, 2018; Oga-Baldwin, 2019). In a study conducted to examine whether and how motivation and engagement differ, Martin et al. (2017), for example, found that motivation and engagement are two distinct constructs, with the former predicting the latter (see also Reeve et al., 2019; Henry, 2021). While motivation has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention within the field of SLA (Boo et al., 2015), engagement tends to be overlooked (Oga-Baldwin, 2019), and hence research on engagement in SLA is still in its infancy (Mercer, 2019; Henry & Thorsen, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, none of the studies conducted thus far has investigated the relationship between student engagement per se and student motivation within the field of L2 pragmatics (Mercer, 2019). Even studies into motivation in L2 pragmatics are surprisingly rare (Taguchi & Roever, 2017, pp. 150-153), and it is obvious that the concept of engagement has not found its way into the field.

To fill the above-mentioned gap, the present study was aimed at investigating the effect of motivation on engagement from the perspective of L2 pragmatics. For the purpose of the present study, the concept of engagement is confined to students' engagement with the pragmatic aspect of the L2, that is, the extent to which they will expend their energy and cognitive resources on the pragmatic aspect of the L2 when they are involved in a communicative event in and outside of class. Accordingly, the present study was narrowly concerned with a domain-specific type of engagement, which is typical of L2 engagement research (See Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Hiver et al., 2021). The present investigation is anchored within self-determination theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020), according to which human beings have three fundamental psychological needs – competence, relatedness, and autonomy – and the extent to which those needs are

satisfied or thwarted determines the type of motivational regulation people have which, in turn, predicts the intensity of engagement in their L2 learning process (Mercer, 2019; Noels, Lou, et al., 2019). The study specifically aimed to answer the following research question: “Can L2 pragmatic autonomous and controlled motivations predict behavioral engagement with pragmatic aspect of the L2?” This paper is structured as follows: after the description of the issues pertaining to the method of the study (participants, instrument, procedure, and data analysis) in the following section, the findings will be presented and subsequently discussed in light of the previous research findings and the theoretical framework. The paper concludes with the discussion of pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research.

2. Method

Participants

Participants were 76 Indonesian-speaking sophomores (18 males; 58 females) aged between 19 and 21 years ($M = 20$ years, $SD = .46$ years) recruited from three different classes taught by the first author. This sample size has met the minimum sample size required for multiple linear regression analysis with two predictor variables and a medium size of the expected effect (Field, 2009). The participants were enrolled in a four-year undergraduate degree program majoring in International Business Management at a public polytechnic located in the Southern part of Bali. Since the majority of the participants (86.3%) reported that they had never taken any standardized English proficiency test (TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS), they were asked to self-assess their current English proficiency level: 47 (58.75%) students perceived their English proficiency level to be at intermediate level, 31 (38.75%) thought that their English proficiency level was beginner, and only 2 (2.5%) considered themselves as advanced speakers of English.

Instrument

The instrument employed to gather the data for the present study is an online, tailor-made 34-item survey questionnaire, consisting of six items measuring the participants' degree of engagement and 28 items tapping into the quality of their motivation (i.e., motivational regulations). The questionnaire was constructed using a free survey administration application developed by Google, that is Google Forms. All of the items were built using a 6-point Likert scale where the participants were required to indicate their degree of agreement along the following spectrum: strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, and strongly agree. To facilitate ease of comprehension and/or to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding, all of the items and instructions were written in the native language of the participants, that is Indonesian.

As has been noted above, the present study was narrowly focused on one type of engagement, namely behavioral engagement which “concerns involvement in learning and academic tasks and includes behaviors such as effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions, and contributing to class discussion” (Fredricks et al., 2004). The internal consistency of the engagement scale measured using Cronbach's α is .90. This reliability coefficient has exceeded the minimum adequate reliability coefficient, that is .70 (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), indicating that the Engagement scale is internally consistent. The construction of the Motivation scale ($k = 28$) for the present study was guided by SDT, according to which human motivation falls along the following continuum: intrinsic, integrated, identified, introjected, and external regulations. Integrated motivation was not included into the Motivation scale, as it is not relevant to the participants in the present study. The internal consistency (Cronbach's α) coefficients of the four scales making up the Motivation scale are as follows: .85 (Intrinsic scale), .91 (Identified scale), .84 (Introjected scale), and .83 (External scale). Since all the scales making up the Motivation questionnaire have Cronbach's α coefficients greater than the .70 threshold (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), all the scales can be considered to be good in terms of internal consistency.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online in late June 2021 during an English class session by the first author who was also the English teacher. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the participants were informed via a WhatsApp message that they were participating in a research on students' English learning preferences and that their participation was voluntary meaning that they could withdraw their participation at any time they wished. However, they were not made aware of the exact purpose of the study, that the study was conducted to examine the effect of students' motivation and their engagement. The participants took between 10 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Analysis

In line with the conceptualization of human motivation put forth in SDT, the four types of student motivation examined in the present study were collapsed into two global categories, namely autonomous motivation (intrinsic and identified regulations) and controlled motivation (introjected and external regulations). Accordingly, these two motivation categories constitute the predictor variables in the present study, while Engagement is the outcome variable. The data were analyzed using the standard multiple linear regression analysis, wherein the two predictor variables were entered using the forced entry method into the regression equation at once (Field, 2009). All analyses were conducted with the help of SPSS version 23.

3. Results and Discussion

Preliminary analyses

Prior to conducting multiple linear regression analysis, a series of diagnostics tests were performed to ensure that the data for the present study met the assumptions associated with such inferential statistical analysis (Field, 2009). It was found that one data point was a univariate outlier and one was a multivariate outlier, and these two data points were excluded the subsequent analyses. The new data set ($N = 74$) met the assumption of collinearity (Autonomous, Tolerance = .46, VIF = 2.20; Controlled, Tolerance = .46, VIF = 2.20). No autocorrelation was detected in the data (Durbin-Watson = 2.37), indicating that the data met the assumption of independent errors. The result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality on the new data set showed that the normality assumption was indeed satisfied ($D(74) = .07, p > .05$). Finally, the assumption of non-zero variance was also met (variance $_{Autonomous} = 110.49$; variance $_{Controlled} = 71.73$), as were the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics for the three variables in the present study (Autonomous Motivation, Controlled Motivation, and Engagement).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Autonomous	74	40	90	67.61	10.39
Controlled	74	41	78	58.54	8.42
Engagement	74	17	36	26.77	4.62

Although the students' autonomous motivation looks stronger than their controlled motivation in Table 1 above, in actuality they are identical; it is to be borne in mind that the two motivation measures contain different numbers of items, Autonomous ($k = 15$) and Controlled ($k = 13$) (see Instrument of the Method section above). To verify whether or not one motivational orientation is stronger than the other in Table 1 above, we need to divide the mean value by the respective total number of items. The results of such computation revealed that the values for both motivational orientations were identical, Autonomous ($M = 4.51$) versus Controlled ($M = 4.50$), both of which are located somewhere between slightly agree and agree (see the coding system mentioned in the Analysis of the Method section).

Turning now to the students' engagement measured using six items, similar result was found: on average, their response to each item in the Engagement measure was 4.46, slightly lower than the average value for Motivation items, which also lies somewhere between slightly agree and agree, suggesting that both students' motivation and their engagement in learning how to use English appropriately are relatively low.

Zero-order correlations

The following table shows zero-order correlations among the three variables in the present study: Autonomous Motivation, Controlled Motivation and Engagement.

Table 2 Zero-order correlations among variables

	Autonomous	Controlled	Engagement
Autonomous	-		
Controlled	.74*	-	
Engagement	.81*	.87*	-

* $p < .01$

As can be seen from the above table, all correlations are positive and statistically significant at $p < .01$, indicating that as the value of one variable increased, the value of the variable with which it correlated also increased. It is striking to note that the correlation between Controlled Motivation and Engagement (Pearson $r = .87$) was slightly higher than that between Autonomous Motivation and Engagement (Pearson $r = .81$), which could be taken as an early indication that students' controlled motivation might exert a larger effect on their engagement in comparison with their autonomous motivation. The correlation between the two predictor variables (Autonomous Motivation and Controlled Motivation) (Pearson $r = .74$) also reached statistical significance, but the correlation coefficient did not approach .90 which would otherwise have been an indication of the presence of multicollinearity (Field, 2009, p. 224). This confirms the absence of multicollinearity as mentioned earlier in the discussion of assumptions of multiple linear regression analysis in the Preliminary Analyses section. This indicates that these two motivational orientations indeed constitute two different motivational traits, or psychometrically, this could also suggest that the items included in the two measures (Autonomous and Controlled measures) tapped into two different motivational orientations.

Multiple linear regression analysis

The next analysis conducted on the data ($N = 74$) was to determine whether or not the two predictor variables (Autonomous Motivation and Controlled Motivation) could predict the outcome variable (Engagement), either simultaneously or in isolation, or both. This was done, as has been mentioned earlier, using the forced entry method of the standard multiple regression analysis. The results revealed that the two predictor variables (Autonomous and Controlled Motivations) together could significantly predict the outcome variable (Engagement). That is, the simultaneous effect of Autonomous Motivation and Controlled Motivation on Engagement was statistically significant, $F(2, 71) = 161.28, p < .01$. The magnitude of the effect size of the two predictor variables was considerably large, $R^2 = .82$, Adjusted $R^2 = .815$, $F_2 = 4.56^1$. This means that 82% of the variance in Engagement could be explained together by Autonomous Motivation and Controlled Motivation. These findings led us to inquire whether one or both of the predictor variables brought about such an effect on the outcome variable. The following table shows the results.

Table 3 Independent effects of predictor variables

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t
		B	Std. Error	β	
1	(Constant)	- 3.53*	1.70	-	-2.07
	Autonomous	.16**	.03	.37	4.91
	Controlled	.33**	.04	.60	8.05

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

As can be seen from Table 4 above, the independent effect of both predictor variables was indeed statistically significant, and that the magnitude of the effect of Controlled Motivation was twice as large as the effect of Autonomous Motivation, $B = .33, t(71) = 8.05, p < .01$ versus $B = .16, t(71) = 4.91, p < .01$, respectively. As shown by the values of β for Autonomous Motivation ($\beta = .37, p < .05$) and for Controlled Motivation ($\beta = .60, p < .05$), both of the predictor variables brought about a significantly large effect on Engagement (See Keith, 2019, p. 62).

To see how well the multiple linear regression model derived from the data in the present study cross-validates, that is whether or not the model generated from the data in the present study can predict a consistent outcome in different sets of samples, we manually computed the adjusted R^2 using the formula below, following Field's (2009, p. 222) recommendation:

$$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 1 - \left[\left(\frac{n-1}{n-k-1} \right) \left(\frac{n-2}{n-k-2} \right) \left(\frac{n+1}{n} \right) \right] (1 - R^2)$$

We found that the value of the adjusted R^2 (adjusted $R^2 = .81$) was very close to the value of R^2 and identical with the value of adjusted R^2 calculated by SPSS (see above) as well. This gives us confidence that the regression model generated from the data in the present study cross-validates well, or less technically speaking, we can be quite confident that the finding of the present study can be generalized across different sets of samples within the same population to which the participants of the present study belong.

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of autonomous and controlled motivational orientations on behavioral engagement in the context of L2 pragmatics learning. Overall, we found that both types of motivational orientation combined to predict engagement, and that the magnitude of the effect sizes of both motivational orientations was considerably large. This suggests that the extent to which students are keen to get actively engaged in a L2 pragmatics learning activity seems to a large extent to be determined by their autonomous and controlled motivation. This finding lends empirical support to the conception put forth within SDT. According to Noels, Lascano, et al. (2019, p. 823), motivational orientations "frame the quality of the learning experience and can differentially predict the intensity of engagement" (see also Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Another important finding of the study was that Controlled Motivational Orientation brought about an effect which was twice as large as the effect exerted by Autonomous Motivational Orientation on Engagement. We place importance on this latter finding because, to the best of our knowledge, the present study is the first study to document an empirical finding showing the differential degrees of effects of the two motivational orientations on Engagement in the context of L2 pragmatics learning. This finding suggests that as opposed to those adopting autonomous motivational orientation, students with controlled motivational orientation are twice as likely to get actively engaged in a learning activity which centers around how to use English appropriately according to contexts. For example, students who find learning English pragmatics fun, enjoyable, or personally meaningful to themselves might get involved in the learning activity less eagerly compared with those who perceive learning English pragmatics as particularly economically beneficial to themselves.

The fact that controlled motivational regulation imposed a stronger effect on engagement in the present study could also be explained by the nature of the learning context in which the students in the present study reside. In foreign

¹ F^2 was computed using the formula $F^2 = \frac{R^2}{1-R^2}$

language learning contexts, like Indonesia, English is greatly valued for employment purposes (Zein, 2019). Being able to communicate in English effectively in order to get a well-paid (or dream) job lies at the heart of students' learning of English in these contexts. Students' self-esteem plays a greater role in the extent to which they are enthusiastic to expend their energy (physical and mental) to learn the pragmatic aspect of the English language relative to the inherent enjoyment of such a learning activity; they get involved in the pragmatics learning activity more because of their fear of sounding rude or incompetent when speaking in English than their interest in the activity per se. This might be related to their external regulation to a certain degree. When externally regulated, people will perform a behavior because they want to avoid punishment contingencies (Ryan & Deci, 2017). One of the main punishment contingencies the students in the present study try to circumvent is failing to land a desired job, and one of the proximal pathways to failing to get a desired job is to display poor interpersonal communication skills in the job interview, for example by showing that they cannot speak English appropriately, or in other words they sound rude and hence being perceived incompetent by the interviewer.

4. Conclusion

When it comes to learning L2 pragmatics, operationalized as learning how to use the L2 in appropriately according to contexts, the quality of students' motivation largely determines the extent to which they are eagerly engaged in the learning activity, the latter being a crucial pathway to L2 pragmatics learning achievement. Yet not all motivational regulations are important for engagement; controlled motivational regulation takes center stage more than autonomous motivational regulation.

Pedagogically, it implies that in a context where the target language does not serve as the means of communication on a day-to-day basis L2 pedagogy should emphasize more on improving students controlled motivational regulation, for example by constantly reminding students of the economic benefits associated with learning L2 pragmatics. It does not necessarily mean that the students do not need to be made interested in the learning of L2 pragmatics for the sake of the learning activity per se, i.e., intrinsically motivated to learn L2 pragmatics. Quite the contrary, students do need to have intrinsic motivation which can bolster the quality of their engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). After all, the present study found that students' autonomous motivation also exerted some effect on their engagement.

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